

Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents

Chandler Police Department Special Victims Unit

Each year in the US millions of children witness the arrest of a parent

Estimated 1.7 million children currently have a parent in prison

Children whose parents are arrested experience the trauma of the arrest

Physical and mental health issues that can lead to negative academic, behavioral and justice system outcomes



Lesson Objectives

At the end of this block of instruction the participant will;

- ☐ *Provide examples of the long term health effects children may have as a result of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)*
- ☐ *Demonstrate “Pre-arrest” and on scene “arrest” considerations made when taking into custody a parent with minor children*
- ☐ *Identify the appropriate steps to the safe placement of a child with a caretaker*
- ☐ *Identify the developmental and trauma informed approaches to speaking with children at the time of a parental arrest*

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

ACEs are serious childhood traumas that result in toxic stress that can harm a child's brain. This toxic stress may prevent a child from learning, from playing in a healthy way with other children, and can result in long term health problems.

Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACEs)

- ❑ *Observations made during weight loss program finding that child abuse was a common thread*
- ❑ *On-going study of long term effects of childhood trauma on adult health*
- ❑ *Connection between the traumas and family dysfunction suffered as a child to health conditions years later*



ACE Categories

Child Maltreatment

- ☐ *Emotional, Physical, Sexual Abuse*
- ☐ *Emotional and Physical Neglect*

Household /Family Dysfunction

- ☐ *Mother treated violently*
- ☐ *Household substance abuse*
- ☐ *Household mental illness*
- ☐ *Parental separation or divorce*
- ☐ *INCARCERATED HOUSEHOLD MEMBER*



Domestic Violence

- Occurs more often in homes that have children than in those that do not
- 15.5 million children exposed annually in U.S. and younger children are disproportionately represented (under the age of 5)
- 678,932 children abused or neglected in U.S. during 2013 (U.S. Dept. of Health)
- In homes where DV occurs, prevalence of child abuse or neglect may rise to as much as 60%
- Older child victims may feel responsible for the abuse of their care giver
- Children may feel responsible to protect siblings and take on duties inappropriate for their age and developmental capabilities
- These feelings lead to increased levels of stress and undermine healthy development

“The earliest and possibly most damaging psychological trauma is the loss of a secure base”

(Van der Kolk, 1987)

“Witnessing violence and being the victim of violence shatter the child’s confidence that his well being matters and that adults will take care of him.”

(Lieberman and Van Horn, 2005)

Childhood Abuse and Dysfunction

- ❑ Correlation between harmful experiences as a child and health status decades later
- ❑ Childhood abuse and dysfunction disrupt normal brain development
- ❑ So what health issues/concerns may a child experience later in life as a result of this trauma?



How do ACEs affect health?

Through stress. Frequent or prolonged exposure to ACEs can create toxic stress which can damage the developing brain of a child and affect overall health.

Reduces the ability to respond, learn, or figure things out, which can result in problems in school.

Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.

Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.

Increases problems with learning and memory, which can be permanent.

Increases stress hormones which affects the body's ability to fight infection.

May cause lasting health problems.



A Survival Mode Response to toxic stress increases a child's heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscle tension. Their thinking brain is knocked off-line. Self-protection is their priority. In other words:

"I can't hear you! I can't respond to you! I am just trying to be safe!"

Childhood Abuse and Dysfunction

- ❑ Adopt risky behaviors to cope /cover the pain
- ❑ Risky behaviors result in disease/death
- ❑ Strong influence in teen pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, instability in relationships, work performance, increase risk of victimization, risk of violence
- ❑ Risk of unhealthy behavior, disease, disability, premature mortality



Child Victims as Adults

- ❑ Difficulties in forming strong relationships
- ❑ Less likely to be able to provide necessary support to their own children
- ❑ Adults who have been victimized by violence as children are at an increased risk for perpetrating violence and being victimized by violence in their own relationships

ACE Study Results (4 or more)

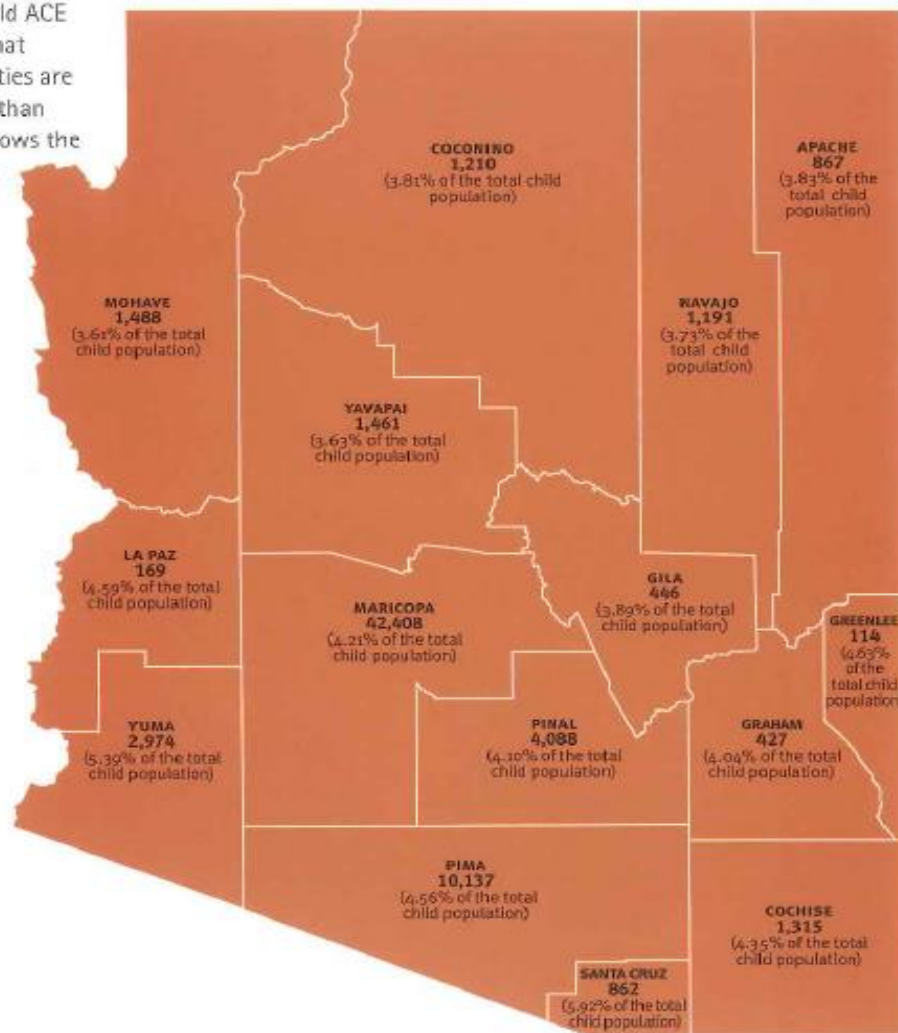
- ❑ 4 to 12 fold increase in alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide
- ❑ 2 to 4 fold increase in smoking, poor self-rated health, and greater than 50 sexual intercourse partners, and STDS
- ❑ Increased risk for coronary artery disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures, and liver disease

ACEs in Arizona

- ➔ *Number of Arizona children with 2 or more ACEs is significantly higher than U.S. as a whole*
- ➔ *Arizona children ages 12 to 17, 44.4% have 2 or more ACEs, compared to national average of 30.5%*
- ➔ *Estimated 70,000 Arizona children have more than five ACEs*

Arizona Has ACE Hot Spots

County-level child ACE estimates* reveal that some Arizona counties are hit harder by ACEs than others. This map shows the number of children within Arizona counties who have **five or more ACEs**.



Estimates generated from 2011/12 NSCH data set and 2010 Kids Count population estimates

The Police Officer

The Police Officer is integral to the child's experience and ability to decrease the trauma during the event of a parental arrest



67% of arrest parents are handcuffed in front their children

Children who witness the arrest of parent are 57% percent more likely to have elevated Post Traumatic Stress symptoms than children who did not

Pre-Arrest Planning

- ❑ *Where possible the officer shall determine if a child is present at location*
- ❑ *When reasonably possible, officers may delay an arrest until the is not likely present (school, daycare)*
- ❑ *If delay is not possible make arrangements with DCS*
- ❑ *When reasonably possible, officer should determine if the arrestee and other family members are English language proficient*
- ❑ *A parent should not be allowed to interpret for a child and a child should not be allowed to interpret for a parent*

General Arrest Procedures

Officers should look for clues that children may be present or likely to return soon

- ➔ *Ask the arrestee if they're responsible for the care of a child*
- ➔ *Adults may be reluctant to disclose the presence or responsibility of a child*
- ➔ *Officers need to look for items in plain view*



General Arrest Procedures

If a child is present and an arrest is being made the officer should consider the following when reasonable and prudent

- *Handcuff the parent away from the sight and sound of the child*
- *Determine if the arrestee will be permitted to talk to the child*
- *Safety of others and officers is always priority*



General Arrest Procedures

What if the child is not present at the time of arrest?

- ❑ *Discuss with the parent where the child is or children are and what arrangements can be made to ensure they are picked up and cared for*
- ❑ *Depending on the circumstances, DCS will need to be contacted to assist with the safe placement of the child*

Placement of a Child

A child should be placed with the other parent or legal guardian

- ➔ *If the other parent is unable to care for the child (impairment, physical or mental limitations) a call to DCS will be made*
- ➔ 1-888- SOS-CHILD / 1-888-767-2445



Placement of a Child

What if the other parent is unavailable or unable to care for the child

- ❑ *Give the arrestee the opportunity to identify and contact another caregiver*
- ❑ *In any case where the child is to be placed with some one other than a parent, DCS must be notified*
- ❑ *DCS is ultimately responsible for the placement of a child if not with a legal parent or guardian*
- ❑ *DCS will conduct the necessary background check on the caregiver*

Interacting with the Child

- ❑ *Where appropriate, allow the parent to reassure the child and explain what is happening*
- ❑ *Officer should ask about comfort items for the child (blanket, toy)*
- ❑ *Ask about medical concerns, behavioral, or psychological conditions*



How To Explain A Parent's Arrest To A Child

TODDLER—AGES 1 TO 4

CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF ARREST

- Anxiety that parent will be hurt.
- Fear of separation and loss of parent's protection.
- Unable to psychologically separate harm to parent from harm to self.
- Want to cling to parent to avoid separation.



WHAT TO SAY

- Acknowledge the importance of the parent to the child:
"I know you love your Mom/Dad."
- Speak slowly, in a low, comforting tone:
"I know you are scared, but no one is going to hurt you or your Mommy/Daddy."

HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT & HOW YOU SHOULD RESPOND

- Where possible, avoid use of force on parents in presence of child.
- Anticipate that you may have to remove the child from the parent's arms.



WHEN ARREST IS RAID OR DV

RAID

- Element of surprise may be necessary for effective law enforcement, but will escalate children's reactions.
- Try to ascertain ahead of time if children are present. If possible have them removed to a safe place.

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Info

How To Explain A Parent's Arrest To A Child

PRESCHOOL—AGES 4 TO 5

CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF ARREST

Fear of separation and loss of parent protection:

- Unable to psychologically separate harm to parent from harm to self.
- May cling to parent to avoid separation.

Very anxious that parent will be hurt:

- May view a police officer as an action figure who can help, hurt, or take them away.
- May believe his/her behavior or wishes caused a parent's arrest.



WHAT TO SAY

Speak to the child so that your eyes are level with the child's.

Clarify basic facts in simple language:

- Why the police are there.
- What the police are going to do:
*"I have to take your parent to the police station to talk about some things."
"I've called your grandmother and she's on the way over to be with you."*
- Reassure children it is not their fault.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep (i.e. "I will come back to check on you" unless you know you will).

HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT & HOW YOU SHOULD RESPOND

- Where possible, avoid use of force on parents in presence of child and avoid cuffing the parents in the presence of child.
- Avoid pointing guns at child.
- Try to distract the child.
 - Offer a stuffed animal or a sweater/scarf of the parent to comfort the child.
- Anticipate that if you do use force, the child's reaction will be extreme:
 - Try to protect parent or hit officer.
 - Zone out or be non-reactive.



WHEN ARREST IS RAID OR DV

RAID

- Element of surprise may be necessary for effective law enforcement, but will escalate children's reactions.
- Try to ascertain ahead of time if children are present. If possible, have them removed to a safe place prior to raid.

DV

- While you may perceive yourself as the rescuer of the abused parent, the child may only perceive you as someone using force as the abuser did and not see the difference.
- If the child had any positive connection to the batterer parent, the child may view you as harming their batterer parent.

How To Explain A Parent's Arrest To A Child

SCHOOL AGE—AGES 6 TO 12

CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF ARREST

- Fear of separation and loss of parent protection.
- Concerned with issues of right and wrong, fairness and justice.



WHAT TO SAY

- Deal with child honestly, fairly, and calmly:
"I have to take your parent to the police station to talk about some things. We'll let you know when you can see your parent. In the meantime, I've called your grandmother and she is on her way here to be with you."
- Emphasize that the child did nothing wrong:
"You did nothing wrong. I know you love your parent. This is not your fault."
- If you don't know the answer to the child's question, tell them you don't know but will find out.

HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT & HOW YOU SHOULD RESPOND

- Where possible, avoid use of force on parents in presence of child and avoid cuffing the parents in the presence of child.
- Avoid pointing guns at child.
- Anticipate that if you do use force, the child's reaction will be extreme:
 - Attack officer to protect parent, run, scream, cry.
 - Zone out: be unresponsive, hide, "self-soothe" by doing something repetitively (rocking back and forth).
- Offer a stuffed animal or a sweater/scarf of the parent to comfort the child.



WHEN ARREST IS RAID OR DV

RAID

- Element of surprise may be necessary for effective law enforcement, but will escalate children's reactions.
- Try to ascertain ahead of time if children are present. If possible, have them removed to a safe place.

DV

- The child may run and/or attack the officer/s making arrest to protect parent.
- Child may agree with decision to arrest batterer but feel worried about repercussions of siding with officer in the presence of the batterer.

How To Explain A Parent's Arrest To A Child

ADOLESCENCE—AGES 13 TO 18

CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF ARREST

- Fear of separation and loss of parent's protection.
- Especially fearful of parent being hurt.
- May express anger toward parent and/or officer.
- May try to stand up to officer to protect parent.



WHAT TO SAY

- Do not respond to statements of teens expressing distaste for your presence.
- De-escalate the situation by letting youth vent fear, feelings:
"Hey, this is a tough situation. We're going to take your parent to the police station to talk about this situation."
- Maintain rules and structure to ensure teen feels secure:
"This is the way we have to do it by law. What happens next is ___ and then we will let you know in ___ minutes what's going to happen to dad/mom."
- Ask teens to assist you with younger children:
"What's the best way to get her to come out of the corner? Could you help me?"
"Is there anyone you'd like us to call now?"

HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT & HOW YOU SHOULD RESPOND

- Don't take teens' rude or obnoxious behavior personally.
- Avoid handcuffing parent in front of youth; attempt to block teens' vision of the arrest.
- Anticipate youth may ignore or evade officers out of shame, rage.
- Anticipate youth will:
 - Attack officer to protect parent, vent anger on you instead of parent, run, scream/cry/express rage, be hypersensitive to touch.
 - Zone out: be unresponsive verbally, hide, appear to be paralyzed and unable to move, "self-soothe" by doing something repetitively (rocking back and forth).
- Engage teens in dealing with the arrangements for care; offer the opportunity to help them feel in control of their situation, to whatever degree is possible.

WHEN ARREST IS RAID OR DV

RAID

- Element of surprise may be necessary for effective law enforcement, but escalates the reactions of teens.
- Anticipate that some teens will try to protect themselves.
- Try to ascertain ahead of time if children/teens are present. If possible, have them removed to a safe place.
- Be aware, that teens may run or strike back at officer/s making the arrest.

DV

- Anticipate that some teens will want to help assaulted parent and need guidance as to how.
- Teen may agree with decision to arrest batterer but feel worried about repercussions of siding with officer.



Booking

- ❑ *Booking officer (if different than the arresting officer) should ask the arrestee if they're responsible for the care of a child and if arrangements have been made*
- ❑ *Consider long form complaint or citation instead of booking when possible*



Documentation

- ❑ *Arrestee's statements related to care of the child*
- ❑ *Complete entity entry for the child and for the caretaker*
- ❑ *Home address, work address, contact phone numbers, schools, email address*
- ❑ *DCS case worker , DCS supervisor, report number*



Scenario #1

- ❑ *A mother and her two children (age 6 and 8) are detained at the local Walmart after loss prevention observes the mom concealing \$100 in merchandise*
- ❑ *You are the assigned officer. What considerations are you going to make in reference to safeguarding these children?*



Scenario #2

- ❑ *A woman is arrested after assaulting her boyfriend in the presence of her children. The children are ages 5, 9, and 15.*
- ❑ *You are the assigned officer. What actions are you going to take in reference to safeguarding these children?*



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